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# THE ISNEG LIFE CYCLE. II. MARRIAGE, DEATH, AND BURIAL

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## IV. Marriage

### A. Acquisition of Mates

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Celibacy is unknown to the Isneg. It would probably be very hard to convince them of its possibility, at least in men: they certainly never think about it. And so also prostitution is non-existent. There may perhaps be found a few women of loose morals among the Isneg, but even these could never be called prostitutes. To marry is the ultimate aim of every Isneg young man and young woman, none of them knows of any other course to take; marriage is universal.

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If it should happen that a girl becomes old without having found a husband, she is said to have become the wife of the spirit *Taxindó*. But such cases must be exceedingly rare; I myself have never yet met any.

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### 1. *Incentives to Marriage*

And now let us inquire as to the reasons why Isneg young people want to marry. I shall leave out of consideration the mutual attraction of the sexes, which is certainly a potent inducement, if not the strongest of all, especially when one considers that according to the Isneg code men and women have no other legitimate way of gratifying themselves than by marrying. I shall confine myself to what I might call social reasons.

And first, with reference to the girls. Why does a girl want to marry? For one reason, it is the custom to do so. What is the use of a girl except to be at the disposition of a young man? Who would ever dream of refusing to comply with such a universal custom? Could it be possible for any girl not to enter the state of matrimony? Everybody does it, why not she? Another reason for her marrying is, I think, the craving for children, the desire of having a child of her own. Protection on the part of her husband may perhaps have been a strong factor in bygone times, when head-hunting was the rule, but at present such protection is hardly necessary and, I believe, rarely thought of. An Isneg girl marries because everybody does, because it is the custom, and I think this settles the matter as far as the fair sex is concerned. This state of mind is also well illustrated by the fact that many Isneg widows, at least if they are of a more or less advanced age, never remarry, especially when they have children of their own.

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But with a man, the case is different. Indeed he has two very important reasons for wanting to take a wife, namely: the desire of begetting children, and the necessity of a woman to provide him with his livelihood. These two reasons, however, are not of equal weight, and besides, what is of paramount importance to the generality of the other tribes that inhabit the Mountain Province, as the Kankanay, the Bontok Igorot, and so on, takes only second rank among the Isneg. To these other peoples the longing for children is the strongest motive for obtaining a wife, while the Isneg marry first of all in order to get somebody to provide the necessities of life for them. Leaving aside the daily conversation with natives, which have forcibly convinced me of the truth of the above statement, there are two social institutions which in the manner of their existence in Apayaw and taken together clearly prove it: these are polygamy and divorce.

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Among the other tribes polygamy, in the form of polygyny of course, is very rare and almost entirely unknown, while among the Isneg it has become an integral part of their social organization. Although far from universal, it is still frequent enough to allow us to call it an institution, the more so that in the unwritten law of the Isneg we find actually a definite set of rules that govern the contracting of a subsequent marriage before the first one has been dissolved by death or divorce, the inheritance of children born to people living in polygamy, and so on. Expressions like the following, which may be heard very frequently all over Apayaw, go far to show that the Isneg wants the woman more than anything else: "We are poor . . . , we are to be pitied . . . , we are starving . . . , we have no food . . ." (and almost always) "because there are no women in the house . . . , because there is not a sufficient number of women around".

When at the same time we consider that the principal reason for divorce among the other Mountain tribes does not obtain in Apayaw, it becomes more patent that among the Isneg the question of children is only of secondary importance. Indeed among the Kankanay and others it is an almost universal custom for childless couples to separate and try their luck with somebody else, while among the Isneg the absence of children is no reason for divorce: this has been told me consistently by all my informants, and the facts are there to prove it. It is true that sterile marriages are comparatively few, but still they are numerous enough to allow us to see that the lack of children is not necessarily a sufficient reason for divorce. A Bolo man and his wife *Bannáw* have been married for over ten years and still no children are forthcoming. *Tabtábal* and his wife (also called *Bannáw*) at Lettuakan, *Tóriya* and his wife at Turatok, have been married for a long time without having had the pleasure of seeing children born to them. These places are all far apart from one another, and in no case is there even the hint of a possibility of divorce. The other Mountain tribes want the children first of all; to the Isneg, however, the women are more important than the offspring.

And so polygamy or rather polygyny has become an institution among the Isneg, not so much through the desire of the men to satisfy their sexual appetite, as through the absolute necessity of women in the household for economic reasons. As it is not my intention to make a survey of the whole subprovince of Apayaw, I shall

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584 me by the girl herself, and she did not seem to take the whole affair as at all serious; she did not look as if she was inclined to allow the boy to take possession of her heart, let alone of her whole body.

Marriages between grown-up boys and girls that are arranged by the parents without consulting the interested parties, or at least without the said youngsters having taken the first steps in that direction, are much more frequent, and in many cases the young people readily agree, either because they are not so particular about the qualities of their future partner, provided there be one, or because they are otherwise loath to go against the wishes of their elders. But as in the case of infant marriages, objections on the part of either of the two may be sufficient to prevent either the first proposal or all further developments.

The usual way, however, among our Isneg, is that the young man looks for the girl of his choice, wins her consent, and then informs his parents about the matter. After that the elders of both boy and girl take upon themselves the responsibility of all further transactions and ceremonies.

581 832 826 461 Now what qualities are supposed to make the perfect girl in the eyes of an Isneg boy, or at least what is the boy looking for in the girl to whom he will give his heart? She should be handsome (*napiyâ*) of course, which means that her skin should be clean, smooth and light-colored; the darker the uglier, the whiter the prettier, is a common Isneg criterion. If possible she should be fat and plump; in the eyes of an Isneg, lean girls are not the acme of beauty. But all this is only of secondary importance; she should be *nalagpát*, "diligent, active", and that is more necessary than anything else: all other qualities are subordinate to this one, and the most handsome flirt will be discarded at once for a diligent girl, be she ever so ugly and as thin as a bean stalk.

And so also in the eyes of a girl, a boy be he ever so handsome (*natáram*),—a quality which however is never despised, provided it goes together with the most important one,—will never make a desirable husband if he is not *nalagpét*. He must not necessarily be a *mĕñal*, a brave, but he should love work: that is what counts.

581 171 461 It might be wondered why the question of diligence is by far more important among the Isneg than among other tribes, to whom other qualities look much more valuable. Indeed in Bontok, for instance, at least formerly, a boy would rarely win a girl, if he had not yet shown some sign of courage, either by taking the head of an enemy

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or by some other brave deed. Why is love of work an almost necessary requisite in Apayaw, where the natives are renowned for their laziness? Or is this almost proverbial love of idleness the reason why future partners look for the contrary virtue in their mates? Is the boy perhaps convinced that he will never be able to earn a decent livelihood, if he is not assisted by a woman who is active and industrious? Does he perhaps know all too well that his hatred of exertion and hard work will never lead to anything, if the girl of his choice does not make up for his deficiencies? And does the Isneg girl perhaps look for an active husband as for a jewel of great price, knowing that the scarcer an object is, the costlier it becomes? I do not think so. The Isneg certainly lack all means of comparison between themselves and members of other tribes, and besides they rarely believe that they are lovers of leisure and idleness, as they usually resent very much hearing outsiders say so. I think that the whole question fits in with the social reason for marriage as given above. Boys marry in order to be helped by a woman, and so they necessarily look for an active one first of all; and girls know that they will carry a heavy burden, so they prefer somebody upon whom they can rely in time of need, somebody who will lend them a helping hand and do his full share as far as custom allows. This I believe to be the explanation of the whole situation.

As soon as a boy has attained the age at which marriage may be contemplated in the not too distant future, he passes most of his evenings at the house of marriageable girls, and he usually has little difficulty in knowing more or less intimately any girls that might possibly be conquered by him. He sees them at home, chats with them, sometimes plays with them, and, except when the parents of a girl definitely object to his suitability as a future partner for their daughter, even passes the night sleeping at their houses.

A few girls are real flirts (*aṅkár*); they are, as the Isneg puts it, fond of men, and if such a situation continues for a considerable time, without any prospect of marriage in the near future, they may become broken-hearted and even lose their minds. Nevertheless such cases are the exception, and active courtship (*mamabdy*, from the stem *babdy*, "woman") is generally the exclusive occupation of boys, while the girls, at least outwardly, usually seem to be very hard to please. But a boy has many ways of attracting the attention of the girls. Just to enumerate a few of them:

844 woman, making her delivery so hard that she will die. They are kept there until the woman is strong enough to go outdoors again.

846 As soon as she is able, the woman goes to the river to wash, accompanied by a male relative holding an *aliwa* on which is ginger. On the way he must always be in the rear, as the *aliwa* and ginger are guarding the woman from some *anito* which desires to cut off her head and cause her death. If the *anito* succeeds, she will die suddenly upon reaching home.

When they arrive home, the man places the ginger with the *pungan* and *igad* at the door. These are kept there until the woman is strong enough to go to work. During that time it is strictly prohibited that anyone outside of the family shall enter the house. It means death to do so. This strong taboo is observed until the woman says that she is ready to receive a visitor. The wife seldom leaves her home and work.

586 The marriage bond is permanent; but it may be
[461 broken by the man if he finds that his wife performs
684] very little farm labor. Even though they have children, he is entitled to divorce her upon giving her a
[587] small portion of the conjugal property. Both are
[58 then free to marry again. The woman must impli-
837] citly obey her husband and be absolutely true to him:
684 no little flirting with other men. If she is found guilty of any offence, her fine is heavy. If she commits adultery with another man, both should be killed: the man by the relatives of the wife, and the wife by the relatives of the husband. However, if there are extenuating circumstances and the death sentence is not imposed, both guilty parties are sentenced